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Westly, Environmental Leaders Call on Public Officials to Oppose Weakening of Offshore Drilling Ban

SACRAMENTO – State Controller Steve Westly, along with environmental leaders, today called on California's public officials to immediately oppose any energy measure in Congress that threatens to allow oil drilling off the state's coast.

"California's coastline is under attack," Westly said. "Some in the Bush Administration and Congress are attempting to remove key offshore drilling prohibitions and open our coast to exploration. We cannot let that stand."

Congress is debating whether to allow exploratory drilling in waters that are currently barred from being drilled. The change could come as the House and Senate discuss federal energy legislation in conference committee.

On April 26, the State Lands Commission, of which Westly is a member, passed a resolution urging the President and Congress to continue the federal offshore oil and gas-leasing moratorium. On April 28, the California State Assembly passed a similar resolution (Assembly Joint Resolution 14 – Yee).

"This energy bill is the greatest threat to California's precious coast since the Santa Barbara oil spill. All California elected leaders, from the Governor on down, need to step forward and do all they can to ensure this terrible bill does not become law," Carl Zichella, Regional Staff Director of the Sierra Club, said.

Westly's letter to California's elected officials follows.

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STEVE WESTLY
California State Controller

May 9, 2005

Dear Elected Official:

California's coastline is under attack. The Bush Administration and certain members of Congress are attempting to remove key offshore oil drilling prohibitions and open our coast to exploration.

California's elected officials must send a clear message that we will not allow any weakening of the laws that prevent offshore oil drilling. Oil exploration along our coast threatens both our environment and the economic base of our coastal communities.

On April 26, 2005, the State Lands Commission, of which I am a member, passed a resolution urging the President and Congress to continue the federal offshore oil and gas-leasing moratorium first established more than 24 years ago. The Commission also encouraged Congress to explore options to increase energy independence and reduce reliance on foreign oil by improving energy and automobile fuel efficiency and further developing renewable energy and alternative fuels.

In addition, on April 28, 2005, the California State Assembly passed Assembly Joint Resolution 14 by Assemblymember Leland Yee, which calls for a continuation of the federal offshore oil-drilling moratorium.

Clearly, many of California's leaders are outraged by looming federal actions. But despite past statements in support of a ban on oil drilling in coastal waters, Governor Schwarzenegger has been noticeably silent on the energy bill, which affects this issue greatly. His failure to act now will jeopardize California's ability to effectively combat these federal threats.

We are calling on all public officials in California to immediately stand up and speak out against any energy measure in Congress that threatens to allow drilling off our coast.

Sincerely,

STEVE WESTLY
California State Controller

CARL ZICHELLA, Regional Director
Sierra Club California

SUSAN SMARTT, Executive Director
California League of Conservation Voters

KIM DELFINO, Program Director
California Defenders of Wildlife

MARK GOLD, Executive Director
Heal The Bay

DAN JACOBSON, Legislative Director
Environment California

SUSAN JORDAN, Director
California Coastal Protection Network

LINDA KROP, Chief Counsel
Environmental Defense Center